

President Obama signs bill authorizing advance appropriations to prevent VA budget shortfalls into law

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WASHINGTON, DC— Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) expressed his strong support for H.R. 1016, the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act of 2009, which was signed into law today by President Obama. This bill, which the Congressman cosponsored and voted for, authorizes appropriations for the Veterans Affairs (VA) Department medical care programs one year in advance of the start of each fiscal year.

"For decades now, the VA health care system has been plagued by consistently late and frequently inadequate budgets," the Congressman said on Wednesday. "Final VA appropriations have not been enacted prior to the start of the fiscal year in 19 of the past 22 years, forcing the VA to operate on budgetary stop-gap measures. This puts unnecessary strain on the VA to provide required services without sufficient funding, and leaves the VA hospitals and clinics unable to plan for critical staffing and equipment needs. The result, too often, is long waits for appointments and rationed care."

H.R. 1016 counters this difficulty by authorizing advance appropriations authority for medical care accounts of the Veterans Health Administration for two years. The bill also requires the president to submit a budget request for the VA's medical care accounts for the fiscal year following the fiscal year for which the budget is submitted.

Congressman Sestak has carefully followed the progress of this bill since its introduction, meeting with veteran service organizations to discuss its importance and signing a letter to

Chairman Spratt of the House Budget Committee requesting that the Committee remove the procedural impediment to advance appropriations. The Congressman also signed an additional letter urging President Obama to sign the bill into law swiftly upon passage.

"Having served as a U.S. Naval officer for 31 years and as the highest-ranking military Veteran ever elected to the U.S. Congress, and as the son of a WWII Veteran, I have no higher priority than the welfare of those who wore the cloth of this Nation and their families," said the Congressman. "This common-sense measure is vital, and it is one of many measures I have pursued since the beginning of my career as a legislator, including passage of the Post 9/11 GI Bill, which ensures our heroes successfully transition to civilian life and receive the benefits and care they deserve."